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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [GZ](#)
SUBJECT: WEST BANK POLITICAL FIGURES GIVE THE PA MIXED
REVIEWS FOR ITS HANDLING OF THE GAZA CRISIS

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. West Bank political figures told ConGen that their constituencies are frustrated and angry with Israeli military operations in Gaza. They gave a mixed review of the PA's handling of the crisis, but suggested that PA President Abbas (Abu Mazen) can only lose Palestinian support as ground operations continue and Palestinian fatalities mount. Several contacts emphasized the importance Palestinians place on passage of a UNSC resolution that endorses a cease-fire. End Summary.

Fatah Grassroots Leader

¶2. (C) Qadora Faris, a grassroots Fatah leader close to jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, sharply criticized President Abbas' performance. He told PolFSN that the PA would bear the consequences of the Gaza crisis, the more so the longer the situation continued. He pointed to a perception that the PA is Israel's "guard" at a time when Palestinians are dying. He said the Gaza conflict might become "Hamas' Karamah," referring to March 1968 clashes near the Jordan river between Fatah and the IDF which greatly bolstered Fatah's support. He said President Abbas must address the situation in Gaza using "the emotional language which people understand" or else risk long-term damage to Fatah and PA credibility.

East Jerusalem PLC Member

¶3. (C) Fatah PLC member Bernard Sabella told Poloff that Abu Mazen had handled the Gaza situation well so far, but could not afford to appear to benefit from the Israeli military operations. "If any deal is made that appears to benefit Abu Mazen, that would delegitimize Abu Mazen and the Palestinian Authority totally," he said. Sabella said, "We need to move towards inclusion of Hamas" in the political process, welcoming a Saudi initiative for a national unity government. Even if Hamas is defeated militarily, he said, "it is not assured" that they will also be defeated politically. Sabella said he has heard increasing criticism from his East Jerusalem constituents of Abu Mazen's travel, and cautioned that "the national authority must prove to people it is for the people, and not anything else." Sabella said, "In New York, Abu Mazen needs to condemn Israel's war on Gaza and state the Palestinian position clearly, irrespective of what some diplomats at the U.N. want to hear."

Tubas Governor

¶4. (C) Governor of Tubas Sami Musallam told Poloff that people in Tubas are "angry, depressed, and sad," but understand the PA's position on Gaza. He distinguished

between sympathy for Hamas, which he claimed is low, and sympathy for Gazans as a whole, which is high. "Everyone knows that rockets launched by Hamas are stupid, unsophisticated things that kill more Palestinians than Israelis," he said. He said a local January 5 protest brought out 1,000-1,500 people, including 100-150 women, which he said was unusual among his conservative constituency. "For Tubas, this is like 100,000 people in other places." He said people in Tubas are "not happy with the U.S. position of hampering efforts to get a resolution to stop the war on Gaza," adding that he believes "any impediment to a UNSC resolution will help Hamas." He said President Abbas' handling of the situation is acceptable to most, but there is "some astonishment that PM Fayyad is not more active. He described the government as "almost absent" in the days after airstrikes. He said there have been no IDF incursions in Tubas since airstrikes began, which he said has helped to calm the situation.

Hebron Mayor

15. (C) Hebron Mayor Khaled Osaily told Poloff that Hebronites are "frustrated and disappointed" at the televised images from Gaza. "It's a human tragedy before it's a political tragedy, first of all. We are Palestinians first," he said. The municipality has been organizing meetings, releasing statements, and facilitating peaceful demonstrations, he said, to "release the pressure" building within the public. He urged USG action to pass a UNSC resolution would alleviate the building tension. He praised President Abbas and PM Fayyad for an "excellent job," but

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said a return of PA security forces (PASF) to the Gaza strip will be "difficult." He added that "a transitional period (under international/Arab forces) will be extremely important. Otherwise it will be seen as a return on the backs of Israeli tanks."

WALLES